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ABSTRACT

English as a second language (ESL) teachers find the newspaper a terrific source for easy-to-prepare reusable materials. Travel ads with coupons from the travel section can be cut out for beginning level students to complete and mail in envelopes they address. Students can find places on maps. In addition, intermediate and advanced students can use the brochures they receive to plan trips. The classified section offers garage sale ads, from which students learn how to get around town. They can discuss what to buy and how to plan a sale by writing ads, placing ads by telephone, and answering inquiries about sale merchandise. Cartoons from comic sections can be used by students for discussion of humor and content and for learning vocabulary, especially idioms and slang. Literacy students can use markers to circle names of food they have learned in food sections of the papers. Beginning students can clip and learn to use coupons. Intermediate and advanced students can use recipes for reading and listening comprehension. Daily horoscopes can be used to see if students remember birthdates. Advanced students can read and discuss selected essays and commentaries. Both intermediate and advanced students can use the newspaper for manipulative writing exercise. (YLB)

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TECHNíQUES

A Bag Full of Newspaper Clippings and Other Tricks of the ESL Trade

by Elizabeth Watson Minnz, ESL Teacher with Fairfax County (Virginia) Public Schools

This Technique was edited by Edward V. Jones and Jean H. Lowe, who are editors of the Virginia ABE Newsletter.

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"Bag lady." For most people the term brings to mind an unfortunate woman, carrying a shopping bag crammed with personal belongings, who can be found walking the streets of almost any American city. To many adult educators, however, the words "bag lady" bring to mind a picture of an ESL teacher, loaded down with a shopping bag of realia, a tape recorder, a pile of file folders jammed with pictures, and a dozen books under her arm. ESL "bag ladies" have learned to be prepared for any eventuality: the Xerox machine is broken; the students attending tonight are not the ones who were here last night; the books haven't arrived; or AV equipment is missing. For those of you who are new to the field, who are still in the process of filling up your bags, let me offer a few suggestions for things you might want to include.

My credentials? I've been a "bag lady" for nine years. I've had portfolios, briefcases, and totes, but nothing works as well as "le bag." Nothing else is roomy or sturdy enough to lug around the materials I need for traveling from class to class. It took me a few years to assemble the contents of my bag, and I've continued to add and remove things as my assignments change. Because most of you "bag ladies" in-training are usually alone, at sites isolated from your peers, responsible for multi-level classes, and HORRORS!, without the use of a Xerox machine, my suggestions are practical in nature, and relatively "paper free." They do require some minimal advance preparation, but that's it. I am obligated to confess that few, if any, of my ideas are original, but I would be hard pressed to credit my sources. Whoever you are who inspired me, thanks!

The newspaper is a terrific place to go for easy-to-prepare materials which can be used again and again. A pair of scissors, some envelopes, and colored markers or crayons are the only supplies needed to make a number of teaching aids. Of course, if you must, you can get fancy and add staples, tape, and construction paper, but they really are superfluous.

Start with the travel section of the Sunday newspaper. There are many travel ads which include coupons to fill out and mail for information. Cut out all the coupons you can find (with the ads if they aren't too large). It may take several weeks to accumulate enough for each member of the class. Beginning level students can complete the coupons in class and address envelopes to mail. The ads can be divided into U.S. or world locations and students can find the places on the maps. Intermediate and advanced students can do the same, and then after the requested brochures have been received, the class can use them to plan some trips in small groups. Each group will decide where to go, how, when, with whom, how much money to spend and what to do. Following the small group work, the rest of the class can question the members of each group. This can be a lot of fun and reveals much about the personalities and interests of the students. In one of my classes a group of women decided to go on a shopping trip, and I mean *shopping trip*, to New York. They allotted themselves each three thousand dollars a day in spending money. The rest of us were hysterical as they described where they went and how they spent their money. Thereafter, one of the women was called Mrs. "D" (for dollar) by her classmates. The teacher, of course, collects all the brochures for future use. You could go to a travel agency and get the same information, but that isn't nearly as much fun.

The classified section is another gold mine of material. Clip out the garage sale ads, several for each student. Garage sales are a peculiarly American institution that for our students need some getting used to. My husband, who comes from Poland, for example, says that it would be a great shame for

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someone to sell his belongings, let alone advertise the fact. What a way to teach American culture! Anyway, students can read the ads to learn how to get around town. In small groups, students can discuss what they would or wouldn't buy at garage sales. In preparation for planning a sale, they might write ads, practice placing ads on the phone, and even answer inquiries about sale merchandise. Garage sales are also a great place to use those bargaining skills which can get rusty in the United States, where most everything has a fixed price.

The comic sections of the paper afford another endless source of material. Cut out cartoons, strips or single frames. Sort them into groups of three, as many groups as needed for your class. I prefer no more than four people so that everyone gets a chance to talk. Letter the cartoons in each group A, B, and C, and place the cartoons in numbered envelopes. In class, students can then decide which cartoon in each envelope is the funniest, least funny, most offensive or most culture bound. The envelopes can be passed from group to group and comparisons made. The vocabulary, and especially the idioms and slang will provide the "stuff" for more activities. Students can be encouraged to bring in cartoons they like, both in English and their native language.

The food sections of the paper are also tremendously helpful. Literacy students can use markers to circle the names of food they have learned. They can ask and answer questions about prices. Beginning students can clip coupons and learn how to use them. They can make shopping lists or plan meals. Intermediate and advanced students can use the recipes in food sections for other purposes. Cut out a recipe for each student in your class. If you do this over the course of several weeks or a month, you will also be able to sort recipes into levels of difficulty. Distribute one recipe to each student. The students will read their recipes, making note of unfamiliar words or pronunciation questions. After class discussion, students will practice reading the recipes so that they can later be read to the class. Eventually, each student will read his or her recipe and ask five listening comprehension questions. The questions should be the kind that require one to process information, not simply to recall it.

In addition to learning measurements and becoming familiar with the specialized vocabulary of cooking, which is used so often in other contexts, cross cultural lessons can also be developed. Remember the maxim "You are what you eat"? Ask each student to select a food which reflects his character and personality. Divide the class into small groups and give each group a list of famous names. The group members should assign a food to each. Share the results with the rest of the class. This should provoke some smiles at least.

Since there are few among us who are not interested in food, you can devise several other food related lesson plans that will provide some provocative discussions among intermediate and advanced students. Here are a few ideas to get you started. What foods are respresentative of poor people, rich people, and middle-class people in your country and in the U.S.? What are the most popular foods in your country and in the U.S.? What foods have special powers attributed to them? (Eating fish makes one brainy, for example.) Which foods are aphrodisiacs, medical cures? And on and on. Perhaps your students will even want to share their own favorite food stories and recipes, do some demonstrations of food preparation, or write a cookbook.

Daily horoscopes also lend themselves to use in the ESL classroom. Collect a number over a period of weeks, enough for each student. Literacy students can use the horoscopes to find their signs. This is one way to find out if your students remember their birthdates. Beginning students can ask and answer questions concerning birthdates and signs. Intermediate and advanced students can not only read their horoscopes, but write some for family members, classmates or friends.

In addition to the parts of the newspaper already mentioned, advanced students can read and discuss selected essays or commentaries. Keep in mind that reading a newspaper is a very sophisticated skill due to the incredible number of idioms used. Be careful about what you decide to use. Certainly the advice columns come in handy for teaching American culture. Students can write letters requesting advice that can be answered by other students. Both intermediate and advanced students can use the newspaper for manipulative writing exercises. Past tense verbs can be changed to present or whatever; singular nouns can be made plural; and verbs can be made into gerunds. Literacy students can just underline sight words they recognize.

All in all, the newspaper is a cheap and bountiful resource, and those envelopes you have filled with clippings won't add much weight to the contents of your bag. Besides, won't that daily newspaper you receive be tax deductible if you itemize?